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STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

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HQ USAF FOR XXXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
USCINCENT MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO FOR ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [IS](#) [KMDR](#) [MEDIA](#) [REACTION](#) [REPORT](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

- [1](#). Mideast
- [2](#). U.S.-Israel Relations

Key stories in the media:

All media continued to highlight PM Sharon's physical condition. The Jerusalem Post and Yediot quoted Dr. Yoram Weiss, one of his anesthesiologists, as saying in a briefing outside Jerusalem's Hadassah University Hospital, Ein Karem, last night that Sharon has "stepped meters away from the precipice" and that he is "no longer in immediate danger." This morning, Israel Radio reported that Sharon's doctors will stop administering sedatives to Sharon. Their effect will disappear in 36 hours. Expanding on its lead story on Tuesday, Ha'aretz reported that doctors at Hadassah University Hospital, Ein Karem, discovered that Sharon suffered from a vascular disease when he was hospitalized with his first stroke on December 18, but administered him blood-thinning medication anyway. This morning, Israel Radio cited a rebuttal by the hospital of criticism leveled at Sharon's treatment.

All media reported that Acting PM Ehud Olmert told Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice on Tuesday that

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Israel will allow Palestinians living in East Jerusalem to vote in the January 25 Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) elections, but that it will restrict the participation of terrorist groups. The cabinet will vote on the decision on Sunday. The media reported that the Likud expressed its strong opposition to the move.

In its lead story, Maariv quoted Sharon associates as saying that Likud Chairman Knesset Member Binyamin Netanyahu is taking advantage of the situation by presenting himself in interviews with the media, particularly in Tuesday's edition of The New York Times, as Sharon's most direct inheritor. Speaking on Israel Radio this morning, prominent Kadima Knesset Member Roni Bar-On said that Netanyahu is "squinting towards the U.S. administration." Ha'aretz and Maariv's polls indicate further strengthening of the Kadima Party (see below).

All media reported that Vice Premier Shimon Peres is slated to be No. 2 on Kadima's Knesset list, whereas Justice Minister Tzipi Livni is the party's candidate for the foreign affairs portfolio.

Shin Bet head Yuval Diskin was quoted as saying before the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee on Tuesday that there are 40-km range missiles in the PA.

All media reported that on Tuesday, Iran resumed its uranium enrichment research. The media cited U.S. and European threats to bring the issue to the UN Security Council (UNSC). Visiting U.S. Congressman Tom Lantos (D-CA) was quoted as saying in an interview with The

Jerusalem Post that the U.S. and the EU should impose a range of sanctions against Iran for continuing to press ahead with its nuclear program if the UNSC does not do so.

The Jerusalem Post reported that Tourism Minister Abraham Hirschson, a close ally of Sharon and one of the first members of Kadima, has aborted a potential USD 50-million partnership with American televangelist Pat Robertson to protest his suggestion that Sharon's stroke was God's punishment for the Gaza pullout. The newspaper wrote that the Tourism Ministry was about to sign a deal with Robertson and a group of other evangelical leaders, committing the GOI to providing land and infrastructure for a Christian Heritage Center in the Galilee, while Robertson's group would raise USD 50 million in funding.

All media reported that Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz ordered that work be resumed on three sections of the separation fence in Jerusalem that have been frozen by order of the High Court of Justice. However, media quoted officials in Mofaz's office as saying that the minister merely ordered the construction of a "temporary fence" that will later be moved to wherever the court decides, and that even this part will not be built without first obtaining the court's permission.

Ha'aretz and Maariv quoted Shin Bet chief Yuval Diskin as saying on Tuesday that his agency has given the army and police identifying details of "hilltop youth" from the settlements of Yitzhar and Itamar who are suspected of having cut down olive trees belonging to Palestinians. Leading media cited the Yesha Council of Jewish Settlements in the Territories' claim that Palestinians sometimes label pruned trees as having been vandalized in order to smear the settlers, who are believed responsible for the vandalism. Ha'aretz reported that experts in olive tree cultivation refuted the council's allegations.

Yediot reported that Amir Peretz told the newspaper that as part of an agreement with the PA, he would be willing to give back the Arab villages on the outskirts of Jerusalem's jurisdiction to the control of the PA.

The media reported that primaries in Likud and three small parties are slated to take place on Thursday.

Leading media reported that on Tuesday, the Beersheba District Court indicted Shadi Halawa, a Gaza Strip Hamas activist, for infiltrating Israel in order to enter the West Bank and set up a Hamas cell there. Major media reported that on Tuesday, the Tel Aviv District Court sentenced Abbas al-Sayed to 35 consecutive life sentences, the longest prison term in Israeli history, for involvement in two deadly attacks -- the Passover eve suicide attack in Netanya's Park Hotel in March 2002, which killed 30 Israelis, and a suicide attack in Netanya's Hasharon Mall in May 2001, which killed five Israelis. Some 250 people were wounded in the two attacks.

The Jerusalem Post quoted Meir Elran, the author of a study on the effect of the Intifada on the Israeli public, which was recently released by Tel Aviv University's Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, as saying: "If the Intifada was supposed to undermine the foundations of Israeli society and to bring it to a state of imbalance and destabilization, it has failed."

Channel 10-TV and Ha'aretz published the results of a survey conducted on Monday by Prof. Camille Fuchs of the Amanet Group's Dialogue Institute, which show that Sharon's Kadima Party has recorded another rise in the polls to 44 Knesset seats, compared with 40 seats one day before Sharon's hospitalization. Labor, on the other hand, dropped two seats (to 19), while Likud lost one (to 13). Of the remaining parties, Shinui stands on the threshold for Knesset entry, with 4 seats. The poll gives Shas 10 seats, with Meretz-Yahad holding steady at 5. The poll also found that Olmert bested his rivals, Netanyahu and Labor Party Chairman Amir Peretz, in personal characteristics such as credibility and suitability to the position of prime minister.

An Israel TV/Geocartographia survey found that Kadima would get 45 Knesset seats, the Labor Party 18, Likud 15, Shas 11, National Union 8, the Arab parties 7, United Torah Judaism 6, Yisrael Beiteinu 3, and Meretz-Yahad 3. The poll found that Shinui and the National Religious Party would get 2 seats each, which is below the threshold for entering the Knesset.

Summary:

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "Israel tried to place the U.S. administration in a dilemma between the two values it is promoting: democratization in the Arab world and the war on terrorism."

Ha'aretz editorialized: "The Likud chairman must not blur his party's essence and place on the political map: a right-wing party whose positions are no guarantee of progress in the peace process."

Senior columnist Haggai Huberman wrote in nationalist, Orthodox Hatzofe: "Israel's objection to the setting up of ballot boxes in Jerusalem stems from its opposition to the posting of Hamas observers, not to an objection to the holding of elections in Israel's capital."

Tel Aviv University political science lecturers Evgeni Klauber and Alberto Spektorovski wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv: "Even without [right-wing politician Avigdor] Lieberman (should he decide to return to the territorial Right), Liebermanism is the prominent trend in Israeli politics."

Editor-in-Chief Lutfi Mashour wrote in independent, moderate Arabic-language Assennara: "The collapse of Sharon's health has brought Israel and the Middle East, particularly as regards the Palestinians, into a new historical stage -- the post-Sharon stage."

Block Quotes:

I. "Olmert Faces Reality"

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (January 11): "Ehud Olmert finally decided to back down and agreed that Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem could vote in the Palestinian legislative elections at polling booths to be stationed at post offices in the city. Thus ended Israel's failed attempt to protest Hamas's participation in the elections.... Israel tried to place the U.S. administration in a dilemma between the two values it is promoting: democratization in the Arab world and the war on terrorism. The Americans made it clear that they consider the Palestinian elections, and broad participation in them, to be of top priority. They warned that Israel would be blamed for the postponement of the elections if it insisted on preventing voting in East Jerusalem, and would also be absolving Mahmoud Abbas of his pledge to dismantle the terrorist groups 'after the elections'.... Olmert 'cut to the chase,' in keeping with his approach that there is no point in dragging out decisions that have foregone results. He telephoned Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to inform her of his decision, instead of waiting for the administration's emissaries, Elliott Abrams and David Welch, who are arriving in the region today. He was worried that a further delay in the decision would achieve nothing and merely present him as a doormat who gives in to pressure."

II. "Unwarranted Presumption"

Ha'aretz editorialized (January 11): "In an interview with The New York Times (January 10), [Likud Chairman Binyamin Netanyahu] presented himself as 'Sharon's most direct inheritor.' This claim involves more than a little vulgarity and effrontery. Vulgarity, even to speak of inheriting while the legator is in the hospital in serious condition, and effrontery, because Netanyahu is trying to blur the significant gaps that developed between himself and Sharon over a Palestinian state (as evidenced by the Likud Central Committee vote) and the disengagement, which led to his opportunistic, last-minute resignation from the government. The interview's detailed description of Netanyahu's positions and intentions should he attain power -- from the principle of 'if they give, they will get' to his willingness to use disproportionate force to deter terror -- seem dishonorable in light of his statement that he does not want to make declarations about political strategy, but prefers to postpone the political debate at a time when the focus should be on Sharon's 'battle for life.' At the end of March, the public will be called upon to decide whether Netanyahu is fit to return to power. But the Likud chairman must not blur his party's essence and place on the political map: a right-wing party whose positions are no guarantee of progress in the peace process."

III. "The Olmert Government's Slippery Slope"

Senior columnist Haggai Huberman wrote in nationalist, Orthodox Hatzofe (January 11): "The announcement by Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz that 'the elections in the Palestinian Authority will take place as they did in 1996' heralded the surrender of the Olmert government to the U.S. administration with regard to the Jerusalem issue.... It appears that the Kadima-led Olmert government is about to replicate the process that was then [in 1996] led by one of its senior members -- Shimon Peres.... Israel's objection to the setting up of ballot boxes in Jerusalem stems from its opposition to the posting of Hamas observers, not to an objection to the holding of elections in Israel's capital. According to the Palestinian election regulations, representatives of all parties must be present in each voting center.... The placement of Palestinian ballot boxes in Jerusalem and the propaganda for those elections place a huge question mark above Israel's sovereignty in Jerusalem.... Olmert is simply dividing Jerusalem."

IV. "The Right Will Divide Jerusalem"

Tel Aviv University political science lecturers Evgeni Klauber and Alberto Spektorovski wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv (January 11): "Despite inevitable differences [within the new Right] between Israel and Europe, the declared trend is to strengthen the ethno-national state by delaying, as much as possible, the granting of rights to foreigners and to the national minority in its midst.... To this purpose, Lieberman is prepared to concede not only parts of the Land of Israel [i.e. Israel, including the territories] but also of Israel proper and Jerusalem.... Even without Lieberman (should he decide to return to the territorial Right), Liebermanism is the prominent trend in Israeli politics."

V. "After Sharon"

Editor-in-Chief Lutfi Mashour wrote in independent, moderate Arabic-language Assennara (January 6): "The collapse of Sharon's health has brought Israel and the Middle East, particularly as regards the Palestinians, into a new historical stage -- the post-Sharon stage.... Even if Sharon survives, he will most likely not return to power, not during the coming weeks before the elections and not even afterwards.... Sharon's illness will first of all affect Kadima.... If Olmert proves himself to be powerful as a prime minister or as a head of a coalition, then the next period will be better and more promising. However, if he turns out to be weak and if his coalition relies on the Right, then it will be a horrible period, provided Kadima doesn't get shattered altogether after Sharon, which is also a possibility.... Even if [Amir] Peretz and Olmert follow in Sharon's steps, they still wouldn't have Sharon's power and experience. It seems like a coalition might be formed between Kadima, Labor and Shinui. However, if Netanyahu forms the next government or is part of it, there will be a major regression.... The post-Sharon period will be very different and radiate to all fields of life -- within Israel and outside."

12. U.S.-Israel Relations:

Summary:

Eytan Haber, veteran op-ed writer and assistant to the late prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, commented in an editorial in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "The Foreign Minister did well in reminding Israelis who's the boss, to whom we owe so much, and why we abide by its commands."

Jonathan S. Tobin, executive editor of The Jewish Exponent in Philadelphia, wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "As compelling as the story from Israel might be this week, Jewish fears about the Christian Right and the liberal counter-attack against conservatives remains the key issue for American Jews."

Block Quotes:

1. "Our Life Source"

Eytan Haber, veteran op-ed writer and assistant to the late prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, commented in an editorial in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot

Aharonot (January 11): "Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom said this week that U.S. assistance to Israel amounts to over USD 3 billion this year. There is nothing new in these data, but the Foreign Minister did well in reminding Israelis who's the boss, to whom we owe so much, and why we abide by its commands. We indeed pray three times a day, as we turn eastwards [in the direction of Jerusalem], but with such an amount of aid remedy, we may have to start praying westwards. It is there that we have our source of living water."

II. "Politically Holier Than Thou"

Jonathan S. Tobin, executive editor of The Jewish Exponent in Philadelphia, wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (January 11): "Israelis would be wrong if they assumed that the uncertainty over their political future is the top priority for their American cousins.... While Sharon lay ill at Hadassah Hospital, many American Jews were far more interested in an Italian-American from New Jersey rather than anyone in Israel. The nomination of Judge Samuel Alito to the United States Supreme Court has resulted in a mobilization of a wide cross-section of Jewish groups who oppose him and the Bush administration. That they do so speaks volumes about American Jewish politics and priorities.... So as compelling as the story from Israel might be this week, Jewish fears about the Christian Right and the liberal counter-attack against conservatives remains the key issue for American Jews. And in a week when the Alito confirmation hearings start, even the Sharon illness and the ascent of Ehud Olmert cannot eclipse this struggle."

JONES